

#4

STATUS

N E W S L E T T E R

VOLUME 4 · ISSUE 12

DECEMBER · 1985



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Editor's File

A few notes and observations while pondering the chances of a White Christmas...

It seems like the 256K ram modification for the 8-bit ATARIs has/is really gathering some steam in this neck of the woods. I don't know about other clubs, but we've got at least a dozen intrepid souls who have already created the monsters and probably another dozen who are contemplating it. While I applaud their willingness to experiment, I've also got to question the motivation behind such a "fix", does anybody support the modification? Are any programs geared to take advantage of it? I think that until a substantial majority takes the plunge, or until some of our best-known public domain authors pull something out of their collective hats, the ATARI "RAMBO" (as it has come to be known) will remain little more than a glorified Ram-Disk. Now, while I don't have anything against Ram-Disks, I wouldn't want my puppy (or child, or wife) wandering near the power cord during a crucial file transfer...

Since next month marks the beginning of the new year I'd like to make some changes in the Newsletter; format, content, style, that sort of thing. While I'm proud to admit that we have one of the most unique products in our market, it's also true that it has become a little predictable.

I don't like that.

If you've got any ideas or comments for this change, or you'd like me to take a certain direction, by all means get in touch...either by phone, at the meetings, or on the BBS.

This month we start a monthly column on the RAM modified ATARIs by Dick Litchfield (you're trapped now Dick it's in print) he's the one who took the plunge first and therefore is the one to take all the blame/glory that comes with being a pioneer. Also in this month's Newsletter are articles by Scott Matthews, Ron Johnson and the ever communicative Doug Boynton...Enjoy.

The end of the year is upon us, and that always seems to be a time for looking back, but this year I'd like to invite you to look ahead. The ATARI machine (both the computer and the corporation) seem to be healthy and on the rebound... that alone would be enough cause for optimism, but add to that the spirit and will "to advance the cause" that seems to be the trademark of the average ATARI owner and the new year seems to fairly glow with new horizons! So by all means, look forward to the new year with the anticipation of... well, of a child on Christmas morning... and while you're at it, make sure you do your part to make this a big year for your computer, your computer group and (of course) yourself...

Merry Christmas...

RAMifications

by Dick Litchfield

This is just an introductory article on extended memory for the ATARI 800. Hopefully there will develop in the STATUS ranks a cult of those who will contribute programs and ideas to take advantage of the extended memory. For now here are a few tidbits for those of you who are attempting or considering "The Atari 800-Plus 256K Memory Modification"(c) by David G. Byrd. For those of you who have successfully made the modification, read on...there may be something here for you too!

AN IMPORTANT WORD ABOUT SOLDERING IRONS..."small". Meaning, use a 30 watt (or less) pencil type iron. Those pistol grip monsters of yesteryear will surely get you in trouble. If you don't have a low wattage iron, Radio Shack sells an nice dual range iron (#64-2055). With this iron, you can use the 15 watts for soldering on the chips and the 30 watts for those wide traces on the board.

While we are on the subject of soldering, be sure to use a good grade of ROSIN CORE SOLDER. Use the smaller diameter stuff (I like the .032" diameter). The larger stuff requires more heat and that means more heat on the components too! It also helps to use additional soldering flux. Flux cleans the metal and allows the solder to flow and bond better. Paste flux will do, but liquid flux works better and you are less likely to use too much. Just dab a little flux on each connection before you solder it. When soldering to runs on the board, gently scrape the green coating (its called a Humaseal) off the run where you intend to solder and apply a little flux before soldering the connection.

CONSTRUCTION CONFUSION??

There seems to be some confusion about the wiring of the 74LS158s. Maybe this will help...

Chip ZX4 is mounted on top of Z504.

Chip ZX5 is mounted on top of Z503.

When wiring ZX5 pins 7 and 4 to the 256K memory chips, it is not necessary to run wires to each memory chip. There are two fairly wide runs above the memory chip sockets (chip side of board). The top trace goes to pin 9 of all the memory chips. The trace just below the top trace and just above the memory chip sockets goes to pin 1 of all the memory chips. Use these traces to connect the wires from ZX5 pins 7 and 4.

TESTING 1,2,3..

There are a couple of other tests that should be performed during the construction. On page 4 where it says "NOW FOR THE LAST TEST", Two other tests should be made before the 256K card is installed.

TEST #1

Install the CPU board, ROM board, the 1st 16K memory board (memory slot #1) and the Basic cartridge. Power up the system. Again check for the blue screen. If you don't get the blue screen or READY prompt then power down immediately and check all work performed since the last successful test. After the READY prompt, type "PRINT FRE(0)". The computer should respond with "13326" (with no drives, modem or 850 attached). If all is ok then power down.

TEST #2

Install the other 16K board in memory slot #2. Power up again and check for the blue screen. If you don't get the blue screen or READY prompt then power down and check the second 16K board modifications (jumper removal between M and N, P and R, S and T) and then check the backplane modifications. After the READY prompt type "PRINT FRE(0)". The computer should respond with "29710". If all is ok then power down and proceed to the next test.

***** OPTIONAL TEST *****

If you don't have a spare 16K board, then proceed to Test #3.

I call this the HO-HUM test. Since no modifications were made to memory slot #3 there should be nothing that could go wrong. However, having been in electronics a few years and having numerous experiences with someone called "Murphy" I chose to test it anyway.

You may perform this test if you have a spare 16K board. However, the jumpers (M to N, P to R, and S to T) must be cut to properly test the backplane modification. Install the third 16K board in memory slot #3. Power up and check for the usual blue screen and READY prompt. After the prompt, check available memory again (PRINT FRE(0)). The computer should respond with 37902. If there is a problem, check all work done since the previous successful test. If all is ok then power down and proceed to TEST #3.

TEST #3

Install the 16K boards in Memory slots #1 and #3. Install the 256k memory board in Memory slot #2. Now proceed with the instructions in the installation manual.

If all other tests were ok and you have problems after inserting the 256k memory board, then check your work on the 256K memory board. There is most likely a problem with the addition of the addressing chips (ZX1-ZX6). Check to see if all the wiring is in place. Also check for "cold solder" joints. All solder joints should have a bright and shinny look to them.

SOFTWARE

As stated by David Byrd, "The most effective use of extended memory is as a disk emulator (virtual disk)". The EMDE/OS by H.V. Stacey appears to have been one of the first attempts in this area. Stacey has since superceded EMDE with MACHDOS v3.7a. MACHDOS includes a configure file which allows you to configure the DOS for extended memory size (16K-256K), number and density of drives, number of file buffers, and the extended memory type (130XE, 800-Plus, Axalon, Mace, Mosiac, Intec etc.). The Windhover Project has produced Windhover DOS in several versions depending on your extended memory size. Windhover DOS has a nice feature in that DUP.SYS and MEM.SAV are ramdisk resident and anytime you type DOS, the DUP package is loaded almost instantly from the ramdisk and your program is still avaailable when you return to basic. I plan to cover these Disk Operating Systems more indepth in a future article.

To make use of the the extra memory for other purposes requires switching the middle 16K memory bank OUT and a 16k memory bank of the extended memory IN. This requires using the hardware memory control register at \$D7xx. Normal memory is bank 0 and the extended memory banks are 1 thru 9. More on this in a later article.

That's all I have time for now. Hope this has piqued your interest in the ATARI 800; "The best home computer available".

GIRARD C. LARKIN, JR.
ATTORNEY AT LAW

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Field Service Manuals

by Dr. Know

Do you have any of these problems?

1. With your ATARI 400/800 computer:
 - a. Your printer overprints (hiccups)?
 - b. Complete "LOCKUP" while:
 - 1.) Editing in BASIC?
 - 2.) Running user-written programs?
 - 3.) Running Non-Atari programs?
2. With your Atari 600XL computer failing when a program turns the screen off?
3. With your Atari 1200XL computer:
 - a. SYSTEM RESET malfunctioning?
 - b. No picture with the "STAR RAIDERS" cartridge?
 - c. Loss of video sync (distortion)?
 - d. Loss or drift of audio?
4. With your Atari 810 Disk Drive:
 - a. In speed "drift"?
 - b. Diskette incompatibility or formatting trouble?
 - c. Regular overheating or failure?
5. With your Atari 1050 Disk Drive not booting "seemingly" good commercial disk programs?
6. With your Atari 410 Recorder:
 - a. And lots of "ERROR 143s"?
 - b. Cassette will load on another 410, but not on yours, while other tapes are fine on yours?
 - c. Finding the right starting place of saved programs?
 - d. Data you saved fine coming back altered?
 - e. Error 138s or 140s?

To find the solutions to these and other problems, why not browse thru or check out one of STATUS' library of Field Service Manuals! There is no charge to members, just a deposit, and that can be a check your club treasurer will hold until you finish with the material. Or, maybe you'd like to replace that old ROM version, or your antiquated CTIA chip, or even upgrade that little 400

to match its bigbrother's 48K? All the info you'll need is right there for you in your club's library!

To wrap things up, how about a few bits of trivia/wisdom from just the update sheets in those FSMs? When saving a program to your 410 Recorder using CSAVE, always execute an LPRINT command first to reset POKEY, and clear the data I/O line. Don't worry if you don't have a printer and get an "ERROR 138". Everything is OK. Avoid leaving the PLAY, ADVANCE or REWIND buttons engaged on your recorder after tape movement ceases. This can cause tapes to stretch and warp! If you type "PRINT PEEK(58383)" and hit RETURN, your computer will print one of the following numbers:

56 - means Rev. A,NTSC version

0 - means Rev. B,NTSC version

249 - means PAL (International) version of the O.S. ROM is installed.

The Doctor



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Assembly Language

By Chris Crawford

LECTURE FOUR BRANCHING

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One of the most important ideas in computing is the concept of conditional execution. This is the ability of the program to execute different routines depending on conditions at the time of execution.

The significance of this capability is best realized by considering how programs would operate in its absence. A program without conditional execution would not be able to change its program flow in response to conditions.

In other words, it would always execute the same code in exactly the same order. Every run of the program would follow exactly the same sequence and perform exactly the same operations. Not very interesting, right?

To get a grip on conditional execution, we need to look at it in its simplest expression. The simplest type of conditional execution is binary in nature. We have a chunk of code; the 6502 will either execute it or it will not execute it. The decision is made on the basis of a Boolean value; a true value will tell us to execute the chunk, while a false value will tell the 6502 not to execute the chunk.

The basic mechanism for doing this is through an instruction that performs a transfer of control. This involves nothing more than altering the program counter. You may recall that the program counter is a register in the 6502 that points to the address of the currently executed instruction.

When that instruction has been executed, the program counter is increased by the length of the instruction (1, 2, or 3 bytes, depending on the instruction). It now points to the next instruction. This little system allows the 6502 to step through a program in sequence.

But there are also instructions that will alter the value of the program counter, allowing the 6502 to jump to another area of memory and another part of the program. The simplest of these is the JMP instruction. It takes the form
JMP LABEL.

This loads the value of the LABEL into the program counter. Its effect is to make the 6502 jump to the address of the LABEL and continue the execution from there. It is directly analogous to a GOTO instruction in BASIC.

For conditional execution we need something more. We need the 6502 to have capability to make a binary decision based on a binary value. The solution used by the 6502 involves flags. These are single-bit Boolean values stored together in a single byte of the 6502 called the processor status register (SR).

The status register is eight bits wide but stores only seven flags. These seven flags are labelled N,V,B,D,I,Z, and C. You have already encountered the C (Carry) flag and the D (Decimal) flag. In this chapter, we are concerned only with the N,V,Z, and C flags.

The magic instruction that makes possible conditional execution can take many forms. Its general form is Bfv LABEL. The B stands for "branch". The "f" stands for a flag, and the "v" stands for the value of the flag, either true or false. However, in this case, we do not use the terminology "true or false".

Instead we use the terms "set" or "clear". "Set" means the same thing as "1" or "true", while "clear" means "0" or "false". The label is the address to which the 6502

MODEM
.....PROTECTION.....
YOU PROTECT YOUR
COMPUTER FROM AC
LINE SPIKES. MODEMS
NEED PHONE LINE PROT
ECTION TOO. GET STATE
OF ART PROTECTION
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should branch if the condition is satisfied. If the condition is not satisfied, then the 6502 will simply skip this branch instruction and go to the following instruction. For example, suppose that we have the following instruction sequence:

```
          LDA    #0
          BCS    KARELIA
          LDA    #5
KARELIA  STA    FISH
```

This will first load the accumulator with a zero. Then the 6502 encounters the BCS ("Branch on Carry Set") instruction, It looks at the Carry flag. If this flag is set then the 6502 will indeed branch to the label KARELIA. (For all you geography buffs, Karelia used to be in Finland.) In other words, if the Carry flag is set, the 6502 will skip over the LDA #5 instruction. Thus, a zero will be stored into FISH.

However, if the Carry flag is clear, then the 6502 will not take the branch. It will instead continue executing the next instruction, which will load a 5 into the accumulator. Then it will come to the label KARELIA and store that 5 into FISH. Thus, the value of the Carry flag determines whether a zero or a five is stored into FISH.

The converse of BCS is BCC ("Branch on Carry Clear"). This will cause the 6502 to take the branch if the Carry flag is clear.

There is also a pair of similar instructions for the V-flag. These are BVS and BVC. They will cause the 6502 to branch on the value of the V-flag.

Now the situation gets unnecessarily confusing. The instructions for the Z-flag should be BZS and BZC--"Branch on Z Set" and "Branch on Z Clear". Unfortunately, the dumb designer of the 6502 thought he would get cute at this point, so instead he called these instructions BEQ and BNE, for "Branch on Equal" and "Branch on Not Equal". He never mentioned what he thought is supposed to be equal to what. We're stuck with it, so make the best of it.

Just remember what these instructions really mean BZS and BZC. If you think in terms of the Z-flag, it will work out just fine. If you try to think in terms of equal or not equal, your attention will be diverted from the real truth of the matter and you may make mistakes. So keep your eye on the ball and think in terms of Z!

The next pair of branch instructions use the N-flag. These are even more insidious than the previous two. They are called BMI and BPL, meaning "Branch on Minus" and "Branch on Plus".

At first glance, these appear to be reasonable substitutions for BNS and BNC. After all, if you load the accumulator with a signed number, and the number is negative, then the N-flag will be set, while if the number is positive, the N-flag will be clear.

Thus, it would seem that BMI is truly equivalent to BNS and BPL is truly equivalent to BNC. This is the source of many a bug in beginner's program. Consider the following fragment of code:

```
LDA FISH
SEC
SBC GOAT
BPL POSANSR
```

This code is supposed to branch to POSANSR if FISH is greater than GOAT. And indeed, if FISH is greater than GOAT, then when you subtract GOAT from FISH, you will get a positive result, right? Not necessarily!

Suppose, for example, that the value in FISH is \$C1 and the value in GOAT is 1. When the 6502 subtracts GOAT from FISH, it will get a result of \$C0. Note that the highest bit of result of \$C0 is set to 1. This is the value that will go into the N-flag. In other words, even though FISH is greater than GOAT, the 6502 will not take the branch, and this code will fail.

The moral of this tale is, don't take those instructions literally. They are misleadingly named. When you see BPL, don't think "Branch on Plus", think "Branch on N Clear". Otherwise, you'll screw up someday. By the way the correct branch to use in the above problem is BCS.

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AtariWriter Form Letters And Labels Revisited

By Ron Johnson

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This is Part TWO of Ron's Two Part series on AtariWriter.]

PART II: THE MAILING LABEL

I use peelable labels on long strips often for mailings in my job at Old Dominion University. The following five examples show not only the three most common label sizes, but demonstrate four different fonts (on the Epson FX-80). Fonts can be mixed on labels just as they were in the form letter demo, but I have not done so here for clarity. The rows of numbers show the physical size of each label and the maximum space available for user text. I have given the true dimension of each label because reproduction in the newsletter may not be to full size.

The Atariwriter format line is shown just above each label layout. I used an underline to indicate the inverse video letter Atariwriter uses with control characters.

This first label layout is standard 10 cpi (61) and has been fit to a label with physical dimensions of 4" by 15/16". The format line would be:

B2 D4 G1 I5 J0 L10 R50 S2 T2 Y12

1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890

This format would give a page length of 6 lines (instead of the usual 66) with a top and bottom margin of one line. This leaves room for up to four lines of label or other text. The right margin is 40 plus left margin for a width of 40 characters. The left margin depends on the setting of your strip of labels. Remember that Atariwriter measures rows in half-lines, so Y12 indicates 6 lines, etc. Note also, that the labels have 1/16" between them, so this is really a 1" label. This font is six lines per inch. Thus, the top and bottom line often won't print on the label unless the printer carriage is aligned very carefully. The top of the ribbon is the top of the page.

This second label layout is compressed at 16.7 cpi (62) and has been fit to a label with physical dimensions of 3" by 15/16". The format line would be:

B2 D4 G2 I5 J0 L10 R60 S2 T2 Y12

12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890
12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890
12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890
12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890
12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890
12345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890

This format would give a page length of six lines with the same one line margin top and bottom. The right margin is left margin plus 50.

This third label layout is proportional print (63) and has been fit to the same small 3" by 15/16" label. The format line would be:

B2 D4 G3 I5 J0 L10 R40 S2 T2 Y12

123456789012345678901234567890
123456789012345678901234567890
123456789012345678901234567890
123456789012345678901234567890
123456789012345678901234567890
123456789012345678901234567890

This format has page length of six lines and four lines of text as before, but now has width of only 30 characters.

This fourth label layout is still proportional print, but now has been fit to a label with physical dimensions of 4" by 1 and 7/16" (nominally 4" by 1 and 1/5" including space between labels). The format line would be:

B4 D4 G3 I5 J0 L10 R50 S2 T4 Y18

1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
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1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890
1234567890123456789012345678901234567890

This format has page length of nine lines now with two lines margin top and bottom giving five lines of text. The width is 40 characters.

This fifth label layout is elongated print ([SELECT] E) and has been fit to a label with the same physical dimensions of 4" by 1 and 7/16" as the one above. The format line would be:

B4 D4 G3 I5 J0 L10 R30 S2 T4 Y18 [SELECT] E

```
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
12345678901234567890
```

[SELECT] E

This format would give a page length of nine lines with a top and bottom margin of two lines. This leaves room for five lines of address or other text. The right margin is left margin plus 20.

Again, The left margin depends on the setting of your strip of labels. Print out a set of trial labels on regular paper to see where your left margin is set. Each of the label designs above has at least one line for top and bottom margin. Make B0 or I0 to eliminate bottom or top margin respectively. This gives one or two more lines for text.

Well, I guess your ready to try the practice disk. The sample label lists are (in order as above):

LABEL.001
LABEL.002
LABEL.003
LABEL.004
LABEL.005

Try printing each on regular paper and then on labels if you have a tractor unit. Remember that Atariwriter lets you print the whole file or one page or groups of sequential pages and any number from one to 99! So, if you want six

copies of label 12 type 'N' after the query to print whole file and specify page 12 as the first and last page. Then indicate the number of copies desired (6).

You can make the creation of the label list easier by loading your formletter data file (MERGE.001), removing unwanted lines, adding any needed lines, modifying the format line, and resaving to disk as LABEL.ext!

ADDENDUM

The article by Frank Pazel, AtariWriter Underground Part II, in JACG November, 1984, reprinted in the STATUS Newsletter in December, 1984, contains a small omission. When using the [OPTION] D to transfer a block of text from file to file as Frank explains, you must actually move the text in the original file before it is placed in the buffer by AtariWriter. Now, load in a new file, place the cursor at the desired spot and do [OPTION] D. The text will be placed in the new file.

That's all for now! Look for Epson FX-80 programs converted to ATARI Basic in future issues.

STATUS Minutes

FIRST MEETING--November 14, 1985

President Gene Rodriguez opened the meeting by welcoming the members and visitors. Status officers were then recognized.

*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Gene Rodriguez reported the latest information from Atari and other hardware and software companies.

*

NON-PROFIT COMMITTEE REPORT: No report.

*

SECRETARY'S REPORT: Dick Litchfield reported the STATUS Public Domain Software Award was sent to Trent Dudley. To date no reply has been received.

*

TREASURER'S REPORT: J.C. Petty reported the latest status of the treasury.

*

LIBRARIAN'S REPORT: Dave Howell reported the "JACS Printshop Library Volume 1" had been added to the software library.

*

ACTIVITIES REPORT: Buck Maddrey introduced Don Soward. Don presented a demonstration on using the Atari to decode and display morse code on the screen.

*

OLD BUSINESS: Buck Maddrey reported the arrival of STATUS business cards. Cards were distributed to the membership. These cars will be used to promote the club.

*

NEW BUSINESS: David Levy introduced a motion to award the STATUS public Domain Software Award to Keith Ledbetter for his "Express 1030" program. The motion was seconded by Seegar Poole and then approved.

*

The meeting was then adjourned.

SECOND MEETING--21 November 1985

President Gene Rodriguez opened the meeting by welcoming all members and visitors.

*

DEMONSTRATIONS: Dick Litchfield and J.C. Petty demonstrated Atari 800's with the 288K extended memory/ramdisk modifications installed. Buck Maddrey demonstrated the 1020 plotter.

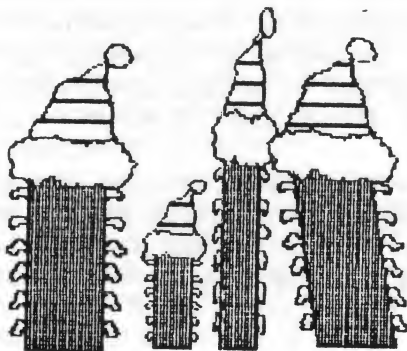
*

SEMINARS: Doug Boynton held a seminar on telecommunications and Xmodem protocol.

*

The meeting was then adjourned.

** Dick Litchfield **
Secretary, STATUS



Telecomputing

By Doug Boynton

Yeah, I know. I promised the results of an on-line survey this month. I must have been under the influence of allergy medicine when I wrote that. I won't belabor the point. But I will say that for the most part, "interaction" and "sharing" are myths when it comes to on-line communication.

So as a substitute, I'll offer my own review of some of the Southside Hampton Roads systems catering to Atari users. Apologies in advance if I've forgotten your favorite.

NORTH END (491-1437): As dependable as the sun rising in the East, this system, operated by Tom Dekker, is the oldest Atari-based BBS in the area. Tom has expanded in recent months to include programs for the Radio Shack Model 100. But 60-70 percent of the downloads offered are Atari. Not much message traffic here, although there's a high user count. Looks as if a lot of people check in often, but don't stay long. Downloads are good, but suffer from a low number of uploads to keep them fresh. On-line password application. 24 Hours.

TEMPLE (473-0643): Operated by Big and Little Nip Harrison, one of the friendliest systems in the area. Downloads usually updated monthly with whatever's current for the Atari. Message base is busy, and usually slightly amusing. Other features include a touch of religion (not overpowering), weekly contests, and unique items like on-line shopping. On-line password application. 24 Hours.

007 (397-1007): Operated by Don Pemberton, this BBS is anything but dull. Frequent updates to the rather intricate welcome and help screens, and to the host software make every visit unique. A large selection of often one-of-a-kind downloads. Once you get past the on-line password application process, and learn to live with the board's ever-changing personality, you'll probably make this a regular stop. 300/1200 baud. 24 Hours.

1030 Killer (xxx-xxxx): Operated by Donny King, this BBS is a real experience. The real experience is figuring out when it's up and running, as the hours of operation are erratic. Downloads are, by and large, average fare. Younger users, will, I'm sure, find the message base interesting. Hours vary from day to day.

MPP Connection (483-1469): A new entry. Formerly the 1030 Connection, according to the SysOp. System was too new to really offer a review last time I called (I was caller #28). Claims 24 Hour service. Password application appears to be on-line.

STATUS (468-1096): Operated by the local Atari users' group. Your SysOp: Me. The usual crop of available downloads, a bit too dependent on Compuserve for new material. Message base seems service-oriented...where to, how to, who to see, etc. Sometimes surprising, but often bland. 300/1200 baud. 24 Hours.

There are some others that pop up from time to time, and probably some I'm not familiar with. Watch the systems above, and check out their "Other Numbers" sections for more. The most interesting experiences are in finding folks who may be "testing" a new BBS on a weekend. Watch for these opportunities.

OTHER STUFF: COMPUSEVE's SIG*ATARI SysOps are begging folks not to attempt downloads during the system's peak hours (8pm-1am Eastern), because the system is overloaded to the point of being unreliable. Time-sharing systems like COMPUSEVE become slower and slower as more people try to access the mainframe at the same time.

COMPUSEVE has become the victim of its own success. What began as a way for H & R Block (the tax-preparing people) to make money from their massive computer system during the evening hours has mushroomed into a thriving subsidiary so successful that the system has suffered because of all the use it's getting.

If you've been on lately, you're all too familiar with the long delays -- "FILES BUSY" -- or perhaps been a victim of the system seeming to "go to sleep" for minutes at a time. It's still unclear to me whether you get charged for that time on the system. I'm told by customer service that you aren't, but "CONNECT TIME" flashed at log-off compared to my stopwatch doesn't reflect that statement. A move to a new rate-schedule tier (8pm-1am/1am-7am) would appear to be in order to better spread out the users.

COMPUSEVE has been promising new mainframe equipment to handle the load. Chances are, they're trying to figure out if current heavy usage is just a fad, or something worth making that kind of investment in. In the meantime, I'd suggest burning up the "FEEDBACK" lines (no charge while you're there) with complaints about how slow the system is. It can't hurt; and will, at the least, make you feel better.

FINALLY: The new Atari modem may be out. Some messages on COMFUSERVE indicate some folks have them...and are trying to figure out how to use them. More on this as it develops. For my money, the best buy is still the old 835's (used with AMODEM 7.1, if you can find them).

In many respects, this is the end of the season. After the New Year, many of us in the people-helping end of the group will be forced to turn our attention to a new crop of "rookies" who received new equipment for the holidays. To those of you finishing your rookie season, congratulations...you made it. To those of you brand-new to computing or telecommunications, welcome aboard! The door has opened to a new world of experiences.

Happy holidays.

NEXT TIME: "THE ANSWER MAN"

Kidwriter: A Review

by Scott Mathews

Oh...to be a kid again! A kid with an Atari!! Where were these computers when I was growing up? And, where were those great educational programs from Spinnaker?

I keep getting these feelings every time I come across an "educational program" that's more like a toy or game than an instructional tool. When I first looked into Kidwriter, written by Jim and Jack Pejisa, and produced by the folks at Spinnaker last year, I got that feeling.

Yup, you guessed it. Spinnaker's come out with a word processing program just for kids, and, know what? It's really nifty! Why even an old fogey like me can have fun with it...

Kidwriter encourages writing by presenting youngsters with a kind of story board. To get their little creative juices flowing, it first gives them the chance to construct a picture like one in any story book they might have lying around. After they've "drawn" their picture, they can compose a story in the space provided beneath the picture.

There is an introductory demo that reviews all pertinent steps of the process. The authors of Kidwriter obviously put some thought into this

beginning segment, for it doesn't overwhelm or confuse. It explains about making pictures and writing stories to go with them and relates these tasks to the concept of creating a story book. Each page of the demo is illustrated colorfully and contains clean, easy to understand directions. You can quit this introduction by pressing any key.

Constructing pictures for a story is easy. First, a kid chooses a background. There are eleven choices ranging from very basic two tone colors to a neat outer space backdrop. From there, objects can be picked and placed anywhere on the background. Kidwriter offers 99 objects including people, buildings, toys, animals, and spaceships. A unique feature of the program is that a child can change the size and color of the objects chosen. Thus, pictures can be turned out with various hues and some dimension. Keep in mind that "drawing" is done straight from the keyboard. No stick is used which eliminates a lot of frustration for children. As near as I can figure, up to 8 objects may be placed on one background to make a picture. When the picture is finished, it occupies roughly two-thirds of the screen.

A block at the bottom of the screen allows the kid to compose a story about the picture he made. Up to five lines of text may be written in this block. By looking at the picture, the child has a stimulus...that is, he has something to see and write about. Erasing text is a matter of pushing a button.

Kidwriter is fun. It encourages kids to write by being imaginative in its approach and simple in its execution. Other "pluses" include a snappy musical accompaniment for each picture, the ability to create a story book by linking pages, and a save/load utility.

On the downside, Kidwriter lacks a print function. Wouldn't a child like to see a hardcopy of his text at least? Secondly, Spinnaker continues to produce great educational programs with mediocre graphics. Kidwriter can be improved with better graphics. And, why just 11 background pictures and only 99 objects to choose? Jeeze...give the kid in me a break!!

Well, I sense that old feeling creeping in again...If you want to help your kid develop his imagination and writing skills, then check out Kidwriter.



President's Column

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all Happy Holidays, and specially to those of you who assisted in making STATUS the best group in the area. Your assistance throughout the year is greatly appreciated.

RAMBO-XL!!!, TERMINATOR-XL!!!!, and 800 256k MOD...Our Head Techie, and Secretary Dick Litchfield, along with a few daring souls who got quick lessons in soldering and schematic reading, have incorporated some of the more daring modifications on their 800's and 800XL's. An 800 with 256K on board, a modified version of MACH DOS and your up to par with the rest of the big guys, they even have the XL's acting like the XE's and this didn't happen overnight, some electronics wizard is working on his 130XE, documenting his development and ready to pass the information around in the public domain so that we all can share in his discovery... Gee!!, I wonder what they will call that mod, let's see...THE ELIMINATOR-XE...

We have a 1090XL expansion box and are patiently waiting for someone to come to the rescue with a mod of some kind with schematics etc., our Head Techie says "One of these days I'll take a look at it...", if any one out there in User Group Land knows of a mod to support the 1090XL expansion box, let me know ...this thing has possibilities... RAM Expansion, Serial/Parallel interfacing, Z-80 co-processor, 80 column video monitor interface...Oh well....

Happy New Year to all...And with the new year comes a new meeting night the FIRST and THIRD MONDAY of the month...See you January 6th, be there.....



S.T.A.T.U.S.

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MEETINGS: S.T.A.T.U.S. meetings are held on the first and third Thursdays of each month at the Baylake Pines Private School, 2204 Treasure Island Dr., in Virginia Beach. at 6:30 p.m. All interested parties are welcome to attend.

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Submitted articles are preferred on disk text files, but will be greatfully accepted on hard copy (including handwriting) if you do not have a disc drive. If you have a modem, you can upload your articles to the Editor by calling 499-6021. Articles may be submitted anytime, but will probably not make that month's newsletter if submitted less than one week before the regular meeting date.

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